



May 20, 2015

Senator Wayne Schmidt
Chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee
Michigan State Senate

CC: Senator Mike Kowall, Vice Chair
Senator Curtis Hertel, Minority Vice-Chair
Senator Peter MacGregor
Senator Mike Nofs

Dear Chairman Schmidt,

On behalf of Lake Superior State University I am writing to submit testimony in opposition to HB 4496. Since becoming President of LSSU last June I have appreciated learning more about the Michigan higher education system and the unique role each institution plays in delivering quality education for our students. This is especially visible here at LSSU given our mission as an access institution, our designation as both a university and a community college, and our commitment to offering innovative and unique degree programs for specialized fields. With this structure in mind, my concern is that allowing institutions designated as community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees will harm this system in a number of ways.

The greatest concern that I have is that in principal, allowing community colleges to grant baccalaureate degrees, in areas already served by four-year institutions, will divide Michigan's higher education system into two separate systems that will be forced to compete in spite of having drastically different funding models. In order for community colleges to properly offer baccalaureate degree programs they will need to create additional infrastructure and hire additional professors, administrators, and support staff to deliver the program. This will raise the operating costs at community colleges which will lead to either higher tuition for their students, higher property taxes for the communities they serve, cuts in services to students outside of those programs, or further diminished support for Michigan's Public Universities. I don't believe this model is sustainable and will lead to severe problems in the future.

Further, this could undermine the collaborative relationships that have grown between universities and community colleges. Due to enhanced university-community college articulation agreements, students today enjoy a high degree of flexibility in moving from two-year to four-year institutions, and are able to easily learn the requirements for degree completion through the Michigan Transfer Network. However these agreements will likely be jeopardized by expanding and duplicating services already offered by four-year institutions as we will be forced to compete for the same students in these select few degree programs. This again will put an unnecessary burden on community colleges and will lead to higher tuition, higher property taxes, or cuts in services to students.

Finally, Michigan's public Universities already offer 18 RN and BSN nursing degree completion programs on community college campuses, hospitals, and distance learning sites. Further, twelve public and eight private colleges and universities offer baccalaureate degrees in nursing. Here at LSSU, our program is currently under capacity, and will continue to add capacity as demand increases. In short, I do not believe Michigan is lacking degree programs or regional access to those programs; we simply need more students and increased collaboration. LSSU is committed to this, and has been aggressively recruiting out-of-state students with our innovative tuition plans.

In conclusion, I would ask you to consider the long-term implications of passing this legislation and creating the precedent of allowing community colleges to duplicate the services already offered by the State through its public universities. I believe that in doing so we will create a structural imbalance in our higher education system which will produce long-term problems and weaken the quality of our education.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Tom Pleger", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tom Pleger